

2006-07 WATERFOWL SEASON FRAMEWORKS

Broad frameworks of waterfowl hunting dates, season lengths, and bag limits are developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with states from each of the 4 flyways – Atlantic, Mississippi (including Missouri), Central, and Pacific. A series of technical meetings, administrative review, and public comment are documented in the Federal Register and provide a forum for biological and social considerations. The result of this regulations process is a general waterfowl season framework within which states select specific season dates. All states within each flyway share a common framework of season length and bag limits; Missouri's basic season structure is the same as the 14 Mississippi Flyway states from Minnesota in the North to Louisiana in the South. States can recommend a season more restrictive but no more liberal than the federal framework.

Adaptive Harvest Management:

AHM is a process implemented in 1995, that provides a framework for making harvest regulation decisions with incomplete knowledge of mallard population dynamics (response to harvest, and to habitat) and the role of certain environmental variables (wetland conditions). Development of regulations under AHM requires agreeing on a harvest management objective and a limited number of regulations options (currently 3 packages), and formulating specific models of relationships between harvest and populations (Table 9).

A continuing challenge for AHM is to incorporate other species into the AHM decision-making process. Presently, the AHM protocol is based solely upon the status of mid-continent mallards. Harvest regulations for other species below management objective levels are provided through other provisions, such as limiting the number of days within the overall season framework. The waterfowl management community is beginning to question if these provisions provide adequate regulation of harvest for species such as pintail, black duck, canvasback, and scaup.

For the 10th consecutive year, in 2006, the AHM models call for a 60-day season with a 6-duck daily bag limit. Improved wetland conditions and mallard numbers similar to their long-term average contributed to this recommendation. For more specific information about Adaptive Harvest Management refer to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website at:
<http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/mgmt/ahm/ahm-intro.htm>

Table 9. Duck season options in the Mississippi Flyway .

Regulation	Restrictive	Moderate	Liberal
Season Length	30 days	45 days	60 days
Duck Bag Limit	3 ducks	6 ducks	6 ducks
Mallard Bag Limit (females)	2 (1)	4 (1)	4 (2)

* A closed season is an option each year.

Canvasback:

The management objective for canvasback is to maintain a breeding population of at least 500,000. The current canvasback harvest strategy allows a partial “season within a season”

when the population level is such that it will not support a full season, but a shortened season would result in a predicted breeding population the following spring equal to or greater than 500,000. Otherwise, the season is closed. The canvasback population of 691,000 will support a 60-day season with a 1-bird bag.

Pintail:

There is evidence that pintails have shifted their breeding area to the north, possibly due to changes in habitat. The more northerly distribution of nesting has contributed to lower productivity, less harvest potential, and reduced season lengths and bag limits in recent years. Regardless, improvements in the breeding population this spring will support a 60-day season with a 1-bird daily bag limit.

Scaup:

Numbers of scaup have continued a long-term decline, reaching a record low of 3.2 million during 2006. Although population declines are believed to be the result of landscape level changes, an assessment by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that their reduced population size can no longer sustain the harvest rates of previous years. Therefore, the bag limit will remain at 2 scaup per day in 2006.

Canada Goose Season Framework:

The Mississippi Flyway Technical Section is in the process of updating the EPP management plan to determine if giant Canada geese will buffer EPP harvest and enable states/provinces to manage Canada geese in aggregate. Changes to the EPP plan include lowering the population objective, using a two-year running average population estimate, and eliminating the criteria for a “bust” in production. The updated plan goal is to balance population levels of EPP and giant Canada geese to provide opportunity for hunting and viewing, while minimizing negative interactions between Canada geese and the public. To accomplish this goal, the EPP management plan calls for maintaining a two-year running average population of EPP geese, represented as singles and pairs, of at least 75,000 birds (previously a single-year estimate of 145,000) as measured by the annual breeding ground survey. The harvest management plan will be implemented according to the following strategies and population thresholds:

When the two-year running average breeding ground estimate of singles and pairs is above 75,000: Implement regulations that allow for a 25% increase in EPP harvests in Manitoba, Minnesota, Missouri, Iowa, and Arkansas, compared to 2001-2003 and 2005.

When the two-year running average breeding ground estimate of singles and pairs is between 50,000 and 75,000: Implement regulations that will result in a return to harvest levels similar to 2001-2003 and 2005 in EPP states/province that account for over 5% of the EPP harvest until the two-year average breeding ground estimate of singles and pairs reaches or exceeds 75,000.

When a single-year breeding ground estimate of singles and pairs falls below 50,000: Implement regulations that will result in an additional 25% reduction in EPP harvests in EPP

states/province that account for over 5% of the EPP harvest until the two-year average breeding population of singles and pairs reaches or exceeds 75,000.

Missouri and other EPP states/province are implementing changes in 2006-07 to provide more opportunity and to evaluate the potential of this buffering effect. The number of days available for Missouri goose hunters will increase from 77 to 79 days, and Missouri will no longer have a limit on the number of days allowed between 1 December and 31 January. These changes will give hunters more days of concurrent late season duck and goose hunting and additional opportunity in January when more migrant Canada geese are present. The first segment of at least 9 days prior to 16 October includes a bag limit of three, and during the remainder of the season, a bag limit of two.

White-Fronted Geese:

Mid-Continent Population (MCP) white-fronted geese are managed under cooperative agreements between the Central, Mississippi, and Pacific Flyways. More liberal white-fronted goose regulations since 1999 and increased incidental harvest of white-fronted geese associated with longer duck seasons since 1997 are thought to have contributed to a dramatic decline in numbers of white-fronted geese from over 1 million during fall 2000 to 522,800 during fall 2003. As a result, states in the western three flyways implemented more restrictive regulations beginning in 2005, and provinces in 2006. Restrictive regulations options for states include a choice of either 72 days with a 2-bird bag limit, or 86 days with a 1-bird bag limit.

Conservation Order:

A light goose Conservation Order will be in effect for the 9th consecutive year during spring 2007. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implemented the Conservation Order to reduce numbers of snow and Ross's geese, because they have rapidly increased in number and are causing damage to portions of the fragile arctic tundra. The Conservation Order will be in effect through April 30, 2007. Lesser snow (white and blue color phase) and Ross's geese may be taken with the use of electronic calls, unplugged shotguns, and shooting until ½ hour after sunset. A valid Missouri Migratory Bird Hunting Permit (\$6) is the only permit required for residents and nonresidents to participate in the Conservation Order. There is no bag limit during the Conservation Order.

Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days:

In 1996-1997, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implemented a youth waterfowl hunting day (in addition to regular hunting season days) for youths who are 15 years of age or younger. A 2-day rather than a single-day season was provided beginning in fall 2000 and again will be offered this fall. The youth hunting days incorporate a weekend or holidays up to 14 days before or after the regular season. The bag limit is the same as during the regular season and includes ducks and geese. Youth must be accompanied by an adult who is not allowed to hunt ducks but who can participate in other open seasons (e.g., geese). No permits are required for the youth hunters. Nonhunting adults must be licensed unless the youth hunter possesses a valid hunter education certificate card.